

Copper Country Intermediate School District

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January 10, 2005

State Board of Education
Michigan Department of Education
P.O. Box 30008
Lansing, MI 48909

Members of the State Board of Education:

The purpose for this letter is to attempt to convey the financial condition of the 13 school districts within the Copper Country Intermediate School District.

During my 20 year tenure as Superintendent both at the K-12 level and as an Intermediate Superintendent, I can say without hesitation, that we are collectively experiencing the worst financial conditions in over two decades. As a result, I believe the quality of instruction and the overall educational environment for our 7,000 K-12 children has clearly been jeopardized.

The problem stems largely from a consistent pattern of declining enrollment over the past ten years. Since the 1994-95 school year, all schools have experienced a declining population due to lower birth rates, lack of major industry and migration out of the area. During this ten year period, student population has declined by 700 students within the CCISD. Declining student population, coupled with a substantial shortfall in State foundation revenues over the past four years have provided the basis for a financial crisis within our schools. Increased employee health insurance, escalating retirement costs and major increases in utilities have also contributed to the problem.

Districts have responded with massive budget reductions and consolidation of services. While we have attempted to hold academic programs harmless, this is no longer an option. Districts have eliminated curriculum and class offerings for students, increased class size at all levels, reduced teaching, support and administrative staff from full to part-time, which results in losing excellent staff members. Important activities such as professional development for teachers have been literally eliminated. This is all happening at a time when schools have increased demands for accountability through the No Child Left Behind mandates.

Non-instructional areas have been affected the most during the budget reduction process. Custodians have been laid off and replaced with contract services, busses are not being replaced on an ongoing basis thus creating safety issues, building temperatures have been lowered to save energy costs, building and ground repairs are being postponed.

The bottom line is.....school districts have done everything conceivable to respond to the State's budget crisis. Nine out of thirteen districts must borrow millions of dollars annually for operational purposes. Unfortunately, even with the massive cuts being implemented by schools, expenses continue to exceed available revenues, resulting in deficit spending for the majority of our school districts.

The Governor, legislature and the State Board of Education must focus on solutions which will provide a sustainable source of revenue to support our schools and avert a disastrous situation. Without this commitment, small rural schools will be forced to close their doors and further erode the quality of education for our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "D. Harbour", written in a cursive style.

Dennis P. Harbour
Superintendent

DPH/pm

cc: Bob Staple, President, MASA Region 1, and Superintendent, Kingsford Schools